

## BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action*, trans. Dean Moyar.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xvi + 199 pp.

“The expression of the will as *subjective* or *moral* is action. Action contains the following determinations: ( $\alpha$ ) it must be known by me in its externality as mine; ( $\beta$ ) its essential relation to the concept is one of obligation; and ( $\gamma$ ) it has an essential relation to the will of others” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], sec. 113, p. 140). Hegel’s definition of ‘action’ (*Handlung*) stands at the center of Michael Quante’s *Hegel’s Concept of Action*. Essentially, the book is a close and careful commentary on the sections of the *Philosophy of Right* leading immediately to and from Hegel’s explication of action, that is, sections 105–25. The book is unique in attempting to generate a genuine dialogue between Hegel’s concept of action and contemporary analytic philosophy of action. According to Quante, “Hegel succeeded in developing a theory of intentional action that foreshadows and unifies many insights of contemporary authors” (3), such as Castañeda, Goldman, Anscombe, and Davidson (3), and particularly the role of event description in the attribution of agency.

Over the past two decades there has been a very influential and fruitful dialogue between Hegelian and analytic philosophers, launched primarily through the works of John McDowell, Robert Brandom, and Robert Pippin. Yet, at the time of the publication of the original German version of Quante’s book in 1993,<sup>1</sup> there seemed to be little interest in such a conversation, and the attitude of both camps was mutually rather hostile. In this sense, the book was a genuinely pioneering work, not only because it attempted to create bridges between hostile philosophical traditions, but also because it drew the attention of Hegel scholars to his concept of action, a topic that was mostly neglected till then.

The book is composed of six chapters. The first chapter explicates the presuppositions of Hegel’s discussion of action. The second chapter addresses Hegel’s understanding of intentionality and subjective ends. Following a tentative summary and recapitulation of the results in the third chapter, Quante turns in the fourth chapter to discuss the description of events as actions as opposed to mere deed and the relationship between causation and attribution

1. Michael Quante, *Hegels Begriff der Handlung* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1993).

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of action in Hegel. The fifth chapter studies the connection between rational action and the moral attitude and analyzes Hegel's concept of freedom of choice (*Willkür*). The sixth and last chapter ties together the chapters of the book. It addresses the question of whether intentions can also be causes and then suggests a cursory interpretation of Hegel's view on the mind-body problem. According to the author, the basic ideas of such a theory "are thoroughly compatible with a theory type such as Davidson's anomalous monism" (183).

Of the three moments constituting Hegel's account of action (see the beginning of this review), only the stipulation that an action must be known by the agent as his or hers is likely to command wide agreement at first sight. With regard to the second and third moments, we should note that Hegel's conception of action is exclusively humanistic: "Animals do not act [toward us], also we do not act toward the animals and inorganic bodies. Insofar as the subjective will as such gives itself existence, it is for another intellectual being" (notes from Hegel's the *Philosophy of Right*, quoted in Quante, 88). Hence, our actions are also constituted by their relation to the will of other subjects, a thesis termed by Quante "the social nature of actions" (88).

As noted above, the book is a daring and courageous attempt to break new ground in the study of both Hegel and the philosophy of action. Quante's attitude toward Hegel's text is respectful but not servile, and the discussion is serious and to the point. The author's stated aim—"My goal is to allow the achievements of both conceptions to mutually enlighten each other, and to better understand the phenomenon investigated in both conceptions—namely, human action" (xii)—deserves much applause. Yet, like many other groundbreaking works, it suffers from certain immaturities. The main problem I find in the work is that it seems to be composed of two texts. On the one hand, we have the main text, which more or less seems to be a traditional commentary on a central text of Hegel, while on the other hand, we have the footnotes, which constitute a supercommentary, in which the author attempts to relate Hegel's claims to main positions in the philosophy of action of the 1980s and early 1990s. Given the academic-political conditions of the composition of the book, one can easily understand the author's attempt to win the approval of more traditional Hegel scholars, yet the depth and intensity of the promised dialogue is compromised by its relegation to the footnotes. Similarly, the language of the book (though a precise translation of the original German) is occasionally too fortified within the Hegelian tongue to allow the noninitiated, including contemporary scholars of philosophy of action, to have a ready access to the book's important and interesting claims. Still, I strongly believe the book deserves the patient reading it requires.

One of the main characteristics of the development of Anglo-American philosophy in the last third of the previous century was the slow but steady rehabilitation of the history of philosophy. To be precise, Plato, Aristotle, the empiri-

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cists, and Kant were treated respectfully, for the most part, even by the early generations of analytic philosophers. Hegel, however, was considered by many as the paragon of reckless metaphysics and philosophical obscurantism. In order to allow for the reacceptance of Hegelian philosophy in the Anglo-American world, it was necessary to detach Hegel's philosophy from the ill repute of speculative logic and metaphysics, and Quante mostly followed this track (though he is careful to note the important role Hegel's logic plays in motivating some of the main arguments of the *Philosophy of Right*). The past decade witnessed the phoenix-like reemergence of metaphysics as a central and vital philosophical discipline in the Anglo-American world. Perhaps now comes also the time for a careful, precise, and open dialogue with the metaphysical sides of Hegel's philosophy.

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James Bohman, *Democracy across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi*.  
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In his book, James Bohman defends "republican cosmopolitanism" (102) and in particular the idea that there should be a "republic of humanity, which includes the need for at least some global political institutions to secure non-domination" (128). He argues that transnational democracy is feasible and the appropriate kind of global political institution for securing nondomination. He also argues that transnational democracy is necessary to the development of democracy even within the confines of particular societies. Bohman is attempting to carve out a conceptual space for defining legitimate global political institutions that avoids the pitfall of a global democratic state and the injustice of contemporary international law and institutions that rely on state consent and negotiation. He is concerned to develop the conditions under which the construction of a transnational constitution can be legitimate.

Bohman's central principle is the recently revived republican principle of *nondomination*. He says that "to have robust nondomination is to have a particular kind of normative status, a status allowing one to create and regulate obli-